# How to Write a CV with Little or No Work Experience

## A guidebook for students and recent graduates

**Vlad Mackevic**

# How to Write a CV with Little or No Work Experience

## A guidebook for students and young graduates

**By Vlad Mackevic**

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# How to Write a CV with Little or No Work Experience

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## Preface:

## How to Write a CV (Résumé) When You Have No Work Experience?

So, you've found a job advertisement. Maybe it's a student job, maybe an internship or perhaps you're a recent graduate looking for some serious work but just don't know how to show your prospective employer that you're brilliant. You've only worked as a waiter and belonged to a few student groups and societies. What's brilliant about that?

Both students and recent graduates are faced with the same problem: how to write a good Curriculum Vitae (CV) with little or no work experience and be taken seriously. There are no absolute rules, but this book will provide you with a lot of tips to stimulate your creativity.

This book answers **the eternal questions**:

- What skills are employers looking for?
- How to present yourself professionally?
- How to extract valuable information from the little work experience I've got?
- What to do if I've never had a paid job?
- How important are my duties/responsibilities at the workplace?

What is more, this book gives you advice on how to get work experience and what counts as work experience. Perhaps, it does not contain anything you would not find by just googling it. This is not the point. The point is that I want to share something I've discovered bit by bit over the years of my studies and professional life. And I want to do it for FREE.

It is a great resource for students, young graduates and those that are just starting their careers. Enjoy reading!



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# Chapter 1

## Two Basic Types of CVs and Why You Need One in the First Place

There are two main types of CVs – those based on experience and those based on skills. Naturally, the first type is more popular. It is the usual type of CV that gives a lot of space to describing work experience. So how do you compete in a job market if you have little or no 'serious' work experience?

Well, the answer is simple: you focus your CV on your skills.

I am absolutely certain that, while your work experience as a student hardly extends beyond the traditional range of jobs (cashier, bartender, waitress, salesperson, etc.), you can still present yourself as a well-rounded individual with a set of skills that will make you as competitive as a real professional. Moreover, it explains how to use the fact that you're a student to your advantage. There are many ways to gain valuable and serious work experience. The tips are scattered across the book and you can also find them in **Chapter 14**.

Let me tell you one thing from the start: even in a job that is 'uncool' or unpaid, or both, the most important thing is not **what** you did, but **how** you did it. What did you achieve? What skills did you develop? How can you apply those skills at the new workplace? This is what you have to think about. This eBook provides you with examples of those skills and teaches you how to present them.

A CV does not get you a job. Instead, it gets you an interview. It makes the employer interested. Therefore, a CV is all about PRESENTATION.

**Many people know how to cook. But only great cooks also know how to serve!**

A CV is all about 'serving yourself' (as a tasty dish). It has to be clear, concise and full of powerful words. It is all about presenting your every little achievement as if it were the biggest damn thing in the world! And you are not lying or exaggerating here – it *is* the biggest damn thing. For *you*. In *your* life.



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So let's see how to do it!

**Any Writing Is a Craft: And It Can Be Learnt!**

Writing is hard work – just ask any writer about that and they will confirm it. Writing a CV is also hard work. That is why I wrote this eBook: to make your job easier. Because writing does not come from inspiration. It is a craft and it can be learnt if you know the techniques.



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## Chapter 2

### Basic elements of a CV: the Ingredients of a Perfect Dish

Let's start with the basics. Each CV has a certain number of elements. On a skills-based one, going from top to bottom, the list looks like this:

1. Name and Surname. DO NOT write 'Curriculum Vitae' at the top. It looks just as silly as the word *Newspaper* written in large letters above the small caption that reads *The Times.* The employer who reads it knows what it is without you telling them.

2. Contact details. Your address, telephone number and email. Gender and date of birth are really unnecessary.

3. Personal Profile. This section is optional. Some people are all for it; others advise against. It will be dealt with separately in **Chapter 5: Personal Profile**.

4. Education. Here is your first chance to shine. See more in **Chapter 6: Education and How to Talk about It**.

5. Skills. Now this is the meat of the CV. There are a range of skills that you can present, depending on the places where you've worked and the tasks you've performed. However, the main sets of skills are:

- Communication (spoken and written);
- Customer Service;
- Teamwork (all about co-operation and helping others);
- Planning and Organising;
- Motivation and Working on your own initiative;
- Information Technology and Computer Literacy (including research skills);
- Numeracy;
- Languages;
- Leadership;
- Willingness to Learn;



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- Commercial Awareness.

Most of these skills will be on your CV, and they will also be accompanied by specific examples demonstrating that you, indeed, possess them.

**Chapter 8: Presenting Your Skills** will deal with all of these in greater depth.

6. Work Experience. **Chapter 7: Work Experience and the Lack of It** will explain why you don't even need a job to build a great CV because it is enough to be *socially active*. However, if you do have a job, paid or unpaid, everything counts. Just mention the place of work, dates and job title. Your skills section will tell everything else.

7. Interests. Your interests must be related to the job you're going to do. See **Chapter 9: Interests** for more information.

8. References available on request.

9. Last but not least – an accompanying covering letter. Please see **Chapter 13: Covering Letter Tips** for information on covering letters – how to write them and how NOT to write them.

This list is not exhaustive, but it is the most 'standard' one. I will explain about every one of those elements as we go along.



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## Chapter 3

### The S.M.A.R.T. CV

Before we start dealing with the specifics, I would like to describe what is called a SMART approach. SMART is an acronym that is widely used in self-help literature and the letters of the acronym can stand for diverse words.

In this book, however, the meaning of SMART is:

**S – Specific**

**M – Measurable**

**A – Achievement-oriented**

**R – Relevant**

**T – Traceable**

Let's briefly analyse all of them one by one.

**Specific**

This means detail. In order for your CV to be as convincing as possible, you have to give the details, answering these questions: **What? When? Where?** When describing your education, skills, achievements and work experience, please give the details: dates, places, projects, etc. Do not vaguely state:

*Great teamwork skills.*

Be more specific! Write something like this:

*Took a leading position in a team of 8 people (XXX University Drama Society). Produced 3 shows in 2 years.*

That 'leading position' could have been an assistant to the executive committee, but it's a position of responsibility nonetheless. Write it and be proud of it!



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Work experience – again, be specific. Mention the **What?** the **When?** and the **Where?**

***Secretary/Events Officer***

*XXXX University Volleyball society 2002-2003*
*Organising official and social events. Managing a Facebook community.*

**Measurable**

This is all about the facts and figures. Your results and achievements must be measurable. Let's look at the examples:

*Managed student teams for three university assignments with close deadlines. Teams received first class marks for 2 assignments out of 3.*

*Organised an inter-university conference on green technology, involving 10 speakers from 3 universities.*

As you can see from the above, achievements are measured and illustrated with figures. This is what you should do, too.

**Achievement-oriented**

This is perfectly straightforward. Spend as little time as possible describing your duties (and don't call them duties – they are **responsibilities!**).

Instead, focus on your achievements. Write what skills you have developed, what projects you have accomplished and what rewards you got for it.

I cannot emphasise it more:

WRITE DOWN EVERY SINGLE ACHIEVEMENT, NO MATTER HOW SMALL!

And make it look big and important. Because there are no small achievements. They are all yours. And they are all important. They all make you what you are and contribute to your professional and personal development. They make you better. Every single one of them.



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### Relevant

I will repeat this several times throughout this book. Your CV must be relevant. It must correspond to the job for which you're applying. You would not write about your skills in graphic design if you apply for a job as a banker, would you?

It's very simple – look at the keywords in the job description and make your CV reflect those keywords. If you are applying speculatively (i.e. sending the CV to 100 companies for the same position in case they have a vacancy), then read what the position normally entails and what skills you need for it. One of the best sites is www.prospects.ac.uk.

### Traceable

This means only one thing: do not invent stuff. Do not lie. Just write what you have done. Even if it is not very easy to check whether a company/society exists, the employer might ask you about that non-existent experience in the interview. And you'd better have a well-rehearsed story as well as be prepared to invent more on the spot. Quite honestly, it's not worth it. It won't be fun if you're found out. In short, if you lie – say goodbye.



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## Chapter 4

### The Beginning: Looking Professional

The first impression is the last impression. Your CV must look professional. There are several things you need to consider and all of them are equally important.

Why? Because the employer gives your CV about 20 seconds. At most.

Recruiters, head-hunters, human resource managers receive scores of CVs every day, if not hundreds. This means that you have to capture their attention and make it easy for them to read. If they see you have not bothered to ensure that, they will not bother to read it. Period.

There's something else: a large proportion of the people who will spend 20 seconds on your CV may not be human resources professionals. What does it mean? It means that you'll have to write in simple language and make it very easy to read and to understand. Here are some tips on how to do it.

1. Keep it simple. No fancy fonts. 12 point, Times New Roman, Arial or the like. One-inch margins.

This point can be rather controversial. Some of you may even ask:

**But what about uniqueness and standing out? I don't want my CV to look like everyone else's!**

Yes, standing out is important. However, you can make your CV stand out by printing it on a thicker paper (it can even be a pale shade of yellow or blue). You can also play with the layout using tabs, bullet points, lines, section dividers, etc. This will also make it easy to read – and you DO want to make your recruiter's job easy. They appreciate that.



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2. Do not write CURRICULUM VITAE at the top. I had to repeat this one because many people still make the mistake. **Mr John Smith** or **Ms Jane Smith** typed in a larger font (size 16-18, could be **bold**) is more than enough.

3. Do not provide an autobiography. Focus on what the recruiter needs to know. He/she needs to know if you have those qualities that were specified in the job advertisement. So stick to that and make sure you mention what is required.

4. Divide it into sections. Make it as obvious as possible that THIS section is about your skills and THAT ONE is about your interests.

5. Set up a professional email account. Emails like hotstuff_69@mail.com and killtheclown@mailbox.co.uk do not inspire confidence or give a sense of professionalism. Use your university email or just set up an account with a professionally-looking address (e.g. j.d.smith@yahoo.com).

6. Proofread your CV. Have a friend read it, too. Nothing is more repulsive to an employer than spelling and grammar mistakes. Your CV may go into the bin straight away.

7. Do not mix up your tenses. Write what you DID in past tense and what you are DOING NOW in present tense. Sounds obvious, but it is a pretty common mistake.

8. Avoid clichés. Do not use words like 'think outside the box', or 'team player' etc. See **Chapter 10: Clichés to avoid like the plague**.

9. Do not include a photo. Unless you are applying for a job as a model, actor (-tress), TV presenter or any other job where your face will be seen by millions.

In short, make it look good.

It has to be love at first sight. After all, your CV is your face. Just as you would not arrive to a job interview in your pyjamas, do not send in a sloppy CV.



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## Chapter 5

### Personal Profile

A personal profile is a very brief summary of your education, skills and competences. Experienced professionals do include it at the top of the CV, just under the contact details. However, you really need to know what to include there. For more qualified jobs, CVs are often scanned by machines for certain keywords (usually those mentioned in the job description of the position for which you are applying). Thus, it is important to include those keywords in your CV even if you are not including the profile section.

So, what should a personal profile consist of? And what should it look like? Here are some tips:

1. Make it short – 120 words is the upper limit. Anywhere between 60 and 80 is fine.

2. Do not use 'I' – write in the third person.

3. 1-2 keywords in a sentence. No more.

4. Do not fill your profile with adjectives because you have no space to back them up with examples. Leave that for the Skills section.

5. If you have enough space on the CV (two pages) make it 1.15 line spaced. It will be easier to read. For example, in this eBook, 1.15 line spacing is used.

6. List your special achievements. Mention your education and key skills. Three is the magic number, so list the main three skills/sets of skills at most. Can be two as well because you will mention many things in the Skills section.

7. Mention your career aim.

8. VERY IMPORTANT: Modify it with every different job you apply to. Match it with the job profile. This, in fact, applies to the entire CV. Sending the same CV to one hundred different companies will not



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get you anywhere unless all one hundred have identical job descriptions.

9. Read it aloud to see if it reads well. Have a friend proof it. After all, it is the first thing your future employer sees when they look at your CV.

10. If space is precious, omit the profile altogether. You will have enough of a chance to impress your employers in the Education and Skills sections. If you do not include the profile, mention the keywords in the body of the CV.

**Examples:**

**Mr John Smith**

*A student of Politics and International Relations in the University of XXXX with strong commercial and political awareness (member of the Economics society) and outstanding communication skills (18 months experience as a student journalist and secretary of the Debate Club) looking for an internship in public relations in an NGO. A keen learner, flexible, willing to apply his knowledge and learn new skills with a view to establishing himself in the NGO Communications industry.*

**Ms Jane Smith**

*A recent graduate of Business and French (2:1 honours degree from YYYY University) with experience of project and events management (secretary of the Karate Society for 3 years) as well as strong interest in recruitment (increased the number of the French Society members by 200%; the largest Language Society of the past five years). Looking for opportunities in the field of human resources. Dissertation topic: Employee Retention Strategies in Fashion Retail Business in the UK and France.*

These examples are, in fact, very short. However, they illustrate one of the main ideas of this book: work experience and competences can be found in any student activity. It is important to realise that you have to take advantage of those activities – especially in your first and second years.

You'll be able to find more information on this in my new eBook *Camp UK 10/2012: The Ultimate Post-2012 University Survival Guide, UK Edition,*



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which will be issued in autumn 2012 Please, read www.TheLectureRoom.co.uk for more information.



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## Chapter 6

### Education and How to Talk about It

The main idea regarding the Education section of your CV: list your achievements. The same applies to the Skills section. If you are writing a one-page CV your education section will be small. If your CV is two pages long, then it's worth investing a bit more in a detailed description – not of what you have done, but how well you've done it.

What to mention in your education section:

**University Education**

1. The obvious parts: Degree title, name of the university, years (start and (projected) finish), which year you are in, predicted grade.

**NB: Start with the most recent education. Your university degree is more important than your secondary school grades.**

2. If you are not in your first year, then the average grade of your first year (if you're proud of it). If you don't want your employer to see all your grades, write the best ones. Emphasise your achievements and small victories.

3. Modules/subjects in which you are specialising or for which you received a good grade (if relevant to the job). For example, if you are good at maths, then say it when applying for a job that requires numeracy skills. If your essays are especially good and the job requires written communication skills, put on your CV that you are skilled in research and report writing.

**Examples:**

***Mr John Smith*** *who is in his second year is applying for an internship in a bank:*



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***BSc Marketing and Management. University of XXXX. 2002-2005***

*Currently in 2nd year – First Class predicted. Av. grade for1st year – 67%. First class passes in Mathematics (83%) and HR Psychology (75%).*

***Ms Jane Smith,*** *a first-year student, is applying for a cashier's job in a high-street bookstore.*

***BA English Language. YYYY University.2006-2009.***

*Currently in 1st year. Excellent computer literacy and research skills. First Class pass for the module 'ITC for Language Analysis' (79%).*

Although in a skills-based CV your skills are the centre of attention, your education should not be at the bottom either. To be on the safe side, place it in the beginning.

If your CV is one page long, then stop here. If it is two pages (especially as you enter the second year of your studies and have more to show your employers), then you can add the following details:

4. Any academic awards or special achievements (for example, some universities and schools give awards to the best first-year student).

5. Subjects in which you specialise and grades that you are proud of (once again, **if relevant to the job**).

**School Grades**

It is worth mentioning the results of your grades from the final year of school (A-levels in your case), what subjects you studied and what examinations you took. However, anything else is not really relevant anymore There will come a time when you have so much experience that even school exams won't be relevant, but for now let's keep them – after all, it's been so little time since you sat them.



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## Chapter 7

### Work Experience and the Lack of It

How to present your work experience?

In a skills-based CV, work experience does not take much space. Each job must take no more than 2-3 lines. The format is the following: job title, company, times and duties briefly.

Consider the following examples:

***Journalist***

*XXXX University Gazette  October 2002 – June 2005*
*Writing articles on political and social issues. Editing and Typesetting.*

***Fundraiser***

*Amnesty International Student Society  October 2003 – March 2004*
*Organised events and charity sales to raise money for Rape Crisis Centre.*

***Communications Officer***

*Tae Kwon Do Society  2003 – 2005*
*Managed a social network of 60 members of the society. Organised inter-university competitions.*

You get the idea. Follow the KISS principle – Keep It Short and Simple.

Also, do not worry what the job title is. In the end, the job titles don't matter. What matters are your skills and assets, your achievements and competences related to those achievements.

Let me put it straight for you:

**Any activity, anything you do in university, can count as work experience. The only thing you have to do is DO SOMETHING. The rest will be easy.**



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**For more information on how to get work experience while you are at university see the FREE BONUS at the end of this eBook. Don't forget to check www.TheLectureRoom.co.uk for news on the new eBook that is coming this autumn.**

In the next chapter, I will talk about presenting your skills – the indispensable practical competences that you will have developed throughout your working and academic life.



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## Chapter 8

### Presenting Your Skills

The main thing about your Skills section (the most important one in the skills-based CV) is bringing your greatest achievements into the spotlight. The list of your skills is worthless if it is not backed up with practical examples. Those examples have to be concrete, measurable and well-worded. They have to be S.M.A.R.T. (see **Chapter 3**). They must demonstrate that you know what you're talking about and that you reflect upon what you're doing. They have to answer the following questions: **What? Where? Why? When? Who?** and **How much?**

Below is the list you have already seen in Chapter 2.

These skills are more general and can appear in almost everyone's CV:

- Communication (spoken and written);
- Customer Service;
- Teamwork;
- Planning and Organising;
- Leadership;
- Motivation and Working on your own initiative;
- Willingness to Learn;

The following skills are more specific and will be discussed separately:

- Research;
- Information Technology and Computer Literacy;
- Numeracy;



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- Languages;
- Commercial Awareness.

Let's break all of those down and understand how they have to be presented on your CV.

Naturally, you do not list all of those skills. You have to tailor your CV according to the job description.

Please look at the examples below and see how facts and figures, concrete names of organisations, etc. have been cunningly woven into the text. Note, however, that these are merely examples and that they are provided for inspiration. If your experience is different, just use them as templates.

**1. Communication**

This is all about reaching out to people – persuading, arguing, informing, etc. Here are a few examples how those can be presented:

***Communication Skills***

*Active member of the Public Speaking Club. Elected Speaker of the Week 3 times this year.*

*Six presentations on Academic Writing Help society given in the university. Doubled the number of members and triples the number of visitors.*

*Street fundraising: raised over £1000 for the Raise and Give society Cancer Research Support programme.*

**2. Customer Service**

Those are the skills that you will have developed having worked in any service sector job. Look at the examples below:

***Customer Service Skills:***

*Amplified customer service skills whilst working as a bartender at XXXX Uni Bar. Key competences: efficiency under pressure, multi-tasking and excellent face-to face and telephone manner.*



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*Boosted sales and customer service skills whilst working at Border's bookstore. Key competences: link sale, excellent telephone manner, knowledge of stock.*

### 3. Teamwork

Teamwork is all about co-operation, helping others, managing conflicts and sharing responsibility for successes and failures. Here's what you can write:

***Teamwork Skills:***

*Amplified teamwork skills throughout my academic and professional life.*

*Managed teams for three group assignments; Group got first class passes for two essays and a presentation.*

*Actively involved in a team of volunteers on a Sutton Park conservation project.*

*Worked in a team with the Investment Society when organising the Undergraduate Traders' Conference in university (100 participants, 8 speakers).*

### 4. Planning and Organising

These skills are all about time management and ability to multi-task. They can be presented this way:

***Organisational Skills:***

*Successfully combined studies with part-time employment and participation in student societies.*

*Managed the Facebook page for the University Football Team. Organised society events and social gatherings.*

### 5. Motivation and Working on Your Own Initiative

This is very simple – mention anything you have started by yourself and accomplished on your own, or almost without help from outside.

### 6. Willingness to Learn

This skill – or should I say 'trait' – is incredibly important for a modern employee. It shows that you are open-minded, open to



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new experiences and are willing to take up a new challenge. For instance, this is another example from my CV:

*Having come from a non-scientific background, showed diligence and motivation and learnt on the job whilst working for a science research council.*

- Research;
- Information Technology and Computer Literacy;
- Numeracy;
- Languages;
- Commercial Awareness.

The other five sets of skills (Research, Information Technology, Numeracy, Languages and Commercial Awareness) are job-specific. Languages and IT are more universal – they can be useful in any job, so you must mention your language competencies (native, fluent, intermediate, conversational) and describe your IT skills (Office, Internet-based research, programming, specialist software, etc.) in greater detail.

Research skills are all about seeking and finding information. This includes sound 'googling' skills, as well as reviewing literature for your assignments. As a student, you will have plenty of opportunities to develop those and to provide examples in your CV.

Commercial awareness is also something needed in every job. This is basic knowledge of how businesses operate – demand, supply, marketing and relationships that lead to sales. It also involves understanding the industry in which you are hoping to work. Mostly commons sense, but it's advisable to research it well. Please click here to read a brochure on commercial awareness written by the University of Liverpool.



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## Chapter 9

### Interests

This brief chapter deals with interests. What to put in the CV? What is your employer interested in? Well, here it is:

1. In the majority of cases, your employer does not care what books you've read and what music you like.

2. This means that your interests have to be professionally oriented.

3. For example – if you're applying for a job in banking, then write that you are interested in economics. If your job is in a museum and your degree is not in history, then write you're interested in history. Simple as that.

But don't forget to provide examples that demonstrate your interests are genuine and not made-up!

**4. Do not include socialising into your list of interests.**

5. …yes, even if it is the case!

**6. Because in the employer's language it means drinking.**

7. Make it concrete and specific. Do not write 'travelling'. Write 'Backpacked in France and Spain for 4 months'. Keep the S.M.A.R.T. scheme in mind.

8. Sports (any, even chess,) are a great addition to your list of interests.

9. OK, you can include personal interests too. It does not have to be exclusively professional. You're not a robot. But do not write 'reading and travelling' because everyone else writes it too. It's boring and has become a cliché. 'Cooking, gardening and scuba-diving' sounds much more interesting. At least, you will have something personal to talk about at the interview!



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## Chapter 10

### CV Clichés to Be Avoided Like the Plague!

There are some over-used phrases that can really make your CV look dull. They are known as Clichés. Here are some of the most common ones:

- Excellent communication skills
- Strong work ethic
- Hard worker
- Good team player
- Results oriented

What is the problem with them?

They do not say anything useful about you! Of course, you want to make sure everyone knows how great you are, but your claims are not backed up with specific examples. They are too general. In short – THEY DO NOT MAKE YOU STAND OUT!

Thus, the main purpose of the CV fails.

I have already listed some examples of how you can present your successes (See Chapters 7 and 8).

There are also a few words that you should never put on your CV. The extracts presented below have been adapted from http://www.youtern.com/.

*1. Approximately*

*Why do you have to approximate? You don't know what you did? Or you do know, but creating a good first impression wasn't a big priority for you when the resume was sent to the employer. If you don't know – find out. If you*



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*do know – show some confidence, and tell me down to the tenth percentile what you accomplished. That is impressive! Anything less is lame.*

**Vlad Mackevic's advice: write 'over' or 'more than'. Forget approximation if it is not to the larger side.**

*2. Assisted*

*Unless you work in a dental office or are a point guard, employers don't want to hear about your 'assists'. They hire leaders here, so they want to know that you were the one being assisted. In a humble way, tell them what you did, how you did it, and how many you led in the process.*

**Vlad Mackevic's advice: Instead of writing 'assisted', write 'co-operated closely with the executive team in the position of … [fill the blank]. Achieved A, B and C'.**

**A leader is not necessarily a team manager. A leader is someone who can spot the problem before anybody else does and manage to fix it, either by him/herself or get someone to do it.**

*3. Attempted*

*Never, ever tell me what you wanted to do. Tell me what you did in an emphatic tone, including a quantitative statement, Good examples: 'Increased customer satisfaction by 115%' and 'Exceeded quota by an average of 31.2% every quarter'.*

**Vlad Mackevic's advice: make it sound powerful and complete! Always. Do not give an impression of incomplete work.**

*4. Team player*

*We like team players; we do. However, can you not find a creative way to demonstrate that you are, indeed, a team player? For instance, you could say that you take great pride in being a mentor; that your team with whom you were doing a university assignment had achieved excellent results because of the way you organised things. Or maybe you took initiative during a charity sale with one of the student societies? Anything but 'team player'.*



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*5. Professional*

*Is anyone going to admit they were less-than-professional during their previous jobs? In your career, isn't 'professional' in the same obvious realm as 'I breathe air'? Can't we come up with a better word to describe how we conducted ourselves? Yes, we can. And I'd like to see a little more imagination.*

**Vlad Mackevic's advice: Professionalism can be proven with examples. You will write plenty of those in your Skills, Education and Work Experience sections. If you have the word *professional* in your CV, delete it.**

*7. Hopefully*

*Especially in today's economy, we're seeing way too much of this. I don't get angry, because I understand that people are hungry for work – and are just hoping for a chance to show what they can do. I get it. Do yourself a favour, however: remove this word! There is no hope, at least from me, when you use 'hopefully'.*

**Vlad Mackevic's advice: 'Hopefully' is weak and implies doubt. What I'd really like to see in your CV is more certainty and confidence.**



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## Chapter 11

### The Language of the CV

The language of your CV is as vital as the presentation. Here are several tips for powerful, impact-making CVs:

**1. Proofread it. First yourself, then have a friend look at it.**

Sounds obvious, but grammar mistakes are treacherous. Moreover, they are a massive turn-off for the employers. Check it. Then re-check it.

**2. Use telegraphic speech.**

A CV is a document that gets read fast, for a very short amount of time. You have to get to the essence so don't be too verbose. Cut your sentences. Use bullet-points.

**Bad** (can pass in the covering letter, but not in a CV):

*During my studies I worked as an events officer for the XXX University's Drama Society. I organised social and cultural events, invited local theatre groups for workshops and collaboration, which positively impacted our performance skills and as a result, we produced two successful shows.*

**Good:**

- *Organised events and professional workshops for XXXX University Drama Society.*
- *Result – overall performance improvement and two successful productions*
- *£1000 pounds raised for charity from ticket sales and merchandise.*

**3. Use positive, powerful verbs**

This list was taken from http://resumizer.com/action_verbs.htm. It is a long one, but a good one nonetheless.



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**NB: Remember that none of these words will work without specific examples!**

Achieve
Acted as
Active in
Adapt
Administer
Advice
Allocate
Analyse
Anticipate
Approve
Arrange
Assess
Assist
Attend
Balance
Budget
Calculate
Chaperone
Clarify
Coach
Communicate
Compare
Complete
Conduct
Construct
Consult
Control
Cooperate
Coordinate
Counsel
Create
Decide
Define
Delegate
Demonstrate
Design
Determine
Diagnose
Direct
Discipline
Discover
Display
Distribute
Document
Draft
Earn
Edit
Eliminate
Employ
Enact
Encourage
Enforce
Enhance
Establish
Estimate
Evaluate
Examine
Express
Facilitate
Follow up
Formulate
Gain
Generate
Grade
Guide
Handle
Identify
Illustrate
Implement
Improve
Improvise
Incorporate
Increase
Influence
Inform
Initiate
Inspect
Inspire
Instruct
Integrate
Interact
Interpret
Interview
Investigate
Involve
Judge
Lead
Lecture
Locate
Maintain
Manage
Mediate
Modify
Monitor
Motivate
Negotiate
Observe
Obtain
Operate
Order
Organise
Originate
Oversee
Participate
Perceive
Perform
Plan
Predict



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Prepare
Prescribe
Present
Prevent
Produce
Propose
Prove
Provide
Publicise
Publish
Question
Realise
Recognise
Recommend
Redesign
Refer
Reinforce
Relate
Reorganise
Report
Represent
Research
Resolve
Review
Revise
Schedule
Screen
Select
Serve
Simplify
Solve
Speak
Standardise
Stimulate
Strengthen
Structure
Substitute
Summarise
Supervise
Support
Teach
Test
Train
Transform
Translate
Treat
Tutor
Utilise
Verify
Win
Write



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## Chapter 12

### CV Writing as a WRITING Process

As a writer, I just felt I had to add this little chapter.

You see, in writing a CV the key word is WRITING. As a writer, I must tell you that NO first draft is perfect. Even if it is almost perfect, the key word is ALMOST. Even if this eBook is free, I had to re-write and proof-read its contents several times before I considered it worthy of publication. I did not want to give you, my readers, something crappy and mediocre. You do not want to give the same to your employer.

Roald Dahl once said that his books undergo forty (!) drafts before going to press. This means only one thing: a CV must be rewritten several times before it can be submitted.

Here are some tips on writing and re-writing:

1. Write ALL YOU CAN about your education, skills, work experience, membership in societies, brilliant grades, volunteering and what not.

2. Yes, It can be 10 pages in the beginning.

3. Then cut it down. Cut it down to the essentials that correspond to the job title. Make it two pages. Leave the details out – focus on great achievements. Focus on key skills.

4. After you write it, if you have time, leave it for a day or two. Don't think about it. Come back to it and re-read it. Amend. If you really have no time, leave it for two hours.

5. Read it out loud. If it sounds bad, re-write it.

6. Give it to your friend to read. Four eyes are better than two.

7. Do not delete the material you left out – you can use it in other CVs for other positions.



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8. Take it to your university's careers service. They are professionals and can help you.

9. If you don't like their advice, do it the way you want. You don't even have to follow this book to the letter. Be creative. Be inspired. Be yourself.



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## Chapter 13

### Covering Letter Tips

The covering letter is the first thing that your recruiter sees. I cannot over-emphasise its importance. It has to be impressive. It has to be professional. You must show the person who opens this letter that you care about them and their organisation. Here are some tips how you can do it, adapted from http://www.jobsite.co.uk :

**1. Presentation.**

If your covering letter starts with 'Dear Sir or Madam', think again. People like to be approached personally – so take time to find out who will read your application. If the advert doesn't say it, ring the company and ask who to send the letter to.

Don't forget to put the job title at the top of the letter and reference number where applicable.

Avoid overly long paragraphs, type the letter neatly, always spell-check and never exceed one page.

Don't forget about formatting – a simple font, 12 points (11 is also applicable), one-inch margins, justified.

**2. Style and Grammar**

Do not start with 'I am writing'. It used to be very popular, but now the recruiters can't see this phrase anymore. Just write who you are and what your career ambitions are – this is much more useful!

Also, avoid starting each sentence with 'I' or 'my'. You need to focus on the company rather than yourself (see Point 5: Structure).

**3. Personalise**

The reader must know immediately that you have not sent this letter to another employer. Tailor your letters and decide how



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casual or formal you should make your language. Generalised letters impress no-one. Adjust each letter for the job you're applying for.

**4. Content**

Look at the terminology the employer has used in the ad or written job description or in a conversation and incorporate this into your letter. Don't forget to match their needs to your experience and abilities.

**5. Structure**

In your opening paragraph, say who you are (student, marketer, biologist, etc.), identify the position for which you are applying and indicate how you heard about the position. Write about yourself – your education, your qualifications, your aspirations. Explain what interests you about the job.

Next, write why the organisation interest you. Be flattering. Show that you've researched the organisation and care about what they're doing. Demonstrate interest, knowledge and appreciation.

Your goal in the third paragraph is to show how you can be useful to this particular organisation. Describe what strengths you have to offer by showing the relationship between your skills and experience and the vacancy. You can also describe your previous achievements and how they relate to the vacancy, and identify three reasons why you should be called to interview.

End the letter by stating what your next steps will be (See Point 10: Closing). Refer the reader to your enclosed CV for additional information.

**6. Emphasise**

Find relevant achievements in your work history and quote one or two succinctly and colourfully. It's fine if you have also included them in your CV – your letter should expand on your CV and complement your career summary. To some extent, your covering letter should mirror your CV, but not copy it word-for word. Both should have some hidden elements so that they complete one another.



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**7. Detail**

You will have researched the company as part of your preparation, so when explaining why you are interested in the organisation or position, avoid general statements like 'I am impressed with your products and growth'. Write specifically about which products, what growth and why you are impressed. Your covering letter, just like your CV, should be S.M.A.R.T. (Please see **Chapter 3: The S.M.A.R.T CV**).

**8. Why you**

Answer the question of 'why you?' What makes you worth considering? Emphasise your positive assets, such as education or skills, accomplishments and personal qualities in relation to the employer's needs. Emphasise your strengths and experience

**9. Timing**

If there's a closing date, time your posting so that it arrives a few days after the main 'rush' that occurs within 4-7 days of the advertisement's publication (but not after the closing date!). Alternatively, you may prefer to be the first to respond.

**10. Closing**

End the letter with a specific statement of what your next step will be. If you plan to follow up with a telephone call, say so. If you plan to wait for the employer's response, say so as well. Conclude by saying you look forward to discussing your career with the advertiser



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## A Sample Covering Letter

This is a sample covering letter from a student who is applying for a work placement in a science research company. It is partially based on my own covering letter which got me a great placement in the Science and Technology Facilities Council.

Dear Ms Black,

**Ref: COMM2009-01 Communications Officer**

I am currently a Second Year student, studying English and Journalism at Anytown University, due to graduate in 2011. At the moment, I am seeking a placement in Public Relations, starting June/July 2009, with a view to a long-term career in this field. The placement position in your company really interests me as it is reflects to a very large extent both my professional and personal interests.

Having undertaken research on ABC Ltd., I am aware that your organisation is one of the leaders in the science sector, promoting and supporting pioneering research projects in numerous fields. I was impressed, having found out how powerful the impact of your big your team's work is on the British economy and internal affairs. Moreover, it was really exciting to learn that you organise work experience for 14-16 year-old pupils. Being familiar with the present situation in the UK educational sector, I am aware of science not being a popular area of study among prospective students. This is a great concern for our society, as, regardless of intensive growth of the service sector, scientific research is the engine that motivates progress and drives humanity forward. Despite the fact that my studies are not science-related, I am enthusiastic about making change and I believe that with my skills I would be able to make science more appealing to the young people.

As you can see from my CV, I have professional interest and considerable experience in representation and communications. My employment history reveals my dedication and striving to maximise efficiency. I have been actively engaged in liaising with external stakeholders of the companies that I had worked for, as well as pro-active establishment of a positive image. In addition, one of



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the research topics that really interests me is Global Warming and research on sustainability. I have written articles about it for the Anytown University Gazette, and am currently organising a conference on academic research on green technologies. I possess the skills necessary for this position, being a critical researcher, having excellent command of both written and spoken English, as well as being confident, and used to working under pressure and to the deadline.

I believe that this placement would provide me with an excellent opportunity of deepening and broadening my knowledge of PR, fulfilling my creative and academic potential. The training I would receive would enhance my professional skills required for a career in this field. I would be available for an interview at your convenience and am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Name Surname

Enc. CV



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## Chapter 14 – Free Bonus:

### Ideas and Tips on how to get some work experience while you're a student (so that you'll have something to put on your CV)

Let me begin by saying that when you are at university, you can have any job that pays the bills – because you do not need super-posh work experience to build a great CV. What you need instead is a proactive approach and willingness to give your time and effort to develop new skills.

**Where can you look for a simple job on campus?**

Below are some ideas on where you can look for a job on campus. These are simple jobs that pay the bills:

1. The canteen

2. Campus shops – bookstore, stationer shop, food outlets

3. University pub/bar

4. Event team – flyer distribution

5. Admin – data entry, filling envelopes and other boring office tasks. Talk to the management offices of all departments – you might get lucky

6. Student Representative. Some universities hire their students to tell secondary school and sixth form students how wonderful university is and how many opportunities it can give. If you think you can do it, ask around – perhaps your uni does this too!

**The Benefits of Clubs and Societies**

I can bet that in your first year you joined many clubs and societies. If you still have not, then please do so and as soon as possible! However, joining is only the first step. The next step is **doing something** for the society. As you probably know, every society has an executive committee: the president, the vice-president, the treasurer and the secretary. Each year, you are able to run for elections for one of those positions of responsibility (looks totally awesome on your CV!). However, in my view, a position is only a name, no matter how cool it sounds.



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What really matters is your involvement in the life of your society. This year, you need to become active and get involved as much as you can.

Here's how you can do it:

1. Help organise events.

2. Send around news and interesting items (articles, videos, podcasts etc.) that could be of interest to the members of the society.

3. Represent your society in the wider community, outside the university. 4. Take them to events.

5. Bring interesting people to them.

5. Become a networking geek. Be active.

6. Promote the society.

7. Increase the number of members.

8. When you succeed, put all of this down on your CV as your achievements.

**And finally:**

9. If you cannot find a society to which you are willing to give all your passion, then establish one!

10. Enjoy what you're doing!

**The Power of Volunteering.**

Volunteering has a double benefit.

First of all, **you can get a job that you normally wouldn't** at this stage – that's why it is so important to you, as a student. You can work as a PR officer, a charity fundraiser, as an editor, as an actress, as a photographer, as a social worker, as a journalist for a serious website… You can also work in art and design related fields. The opportunities are endless.

Secondly, your future employer will be only too pleased to see that you've invested your time and effort, learnt new skills and contributed to a greater cause. **It looks great on your CV.**

There is a lot to be gained from volunteering – skills, contacts and personal satisfaction being at the top of the list.



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There are two types of volunteering: in the university and outside it. The number of opportunities depends on the size of the town you are living in.

Moreover, almost every university has a volunteer centre. There are numerous opportunities online too.

Check out these links:

For the United Kingdom:

http://www.volunteering.org.uk/

www.do-it.org.uk

http://www.csv.org.uk/volunteering

For the USA:

http://www.volunteermatch.org/

http://www.volunteeringinamerica.gov/

PS: Volunteering can be a great way to get ahead for people of creative professions.

**Be your own boss – become a freelancer.**

If you feel you're good at something, it's worth looking into freelancing opportunities. Being a self-employed freelancer can have many benefits. You are in charge of your own schedule, have an opportunity to work from home and still gain and develop an impressive set of skills to put on your CV and make employers interested. Here two main things you can do as a student:

**1. Teaching**

Become a freelance tutor. Put up an advert on the wall in your university, advertising your skills:

- Languages (including English for foreigners)
- Maths
- IT



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- Science
- Anything else you want, like graphic design or fine pottery

You can also go to a few local schools and put up your advert there.

If you are in the UK, visit these sites:

http://www.uktutors.com/

http://www.localtutor.co.uk/Tuition_Information/UK_Tutors.html

http://www.firsttutors.com/uk/

You can register on those sites as a freelance tutor in any field from art design to zoology, and set your rates. I advise you to be prudent and not charge too much – after all, you are only a student, not a PhD with 10 years of experience.

**2. Translation and Interpreting**

Speak another language? Try freelance translation and interpreting. Just find out email addresses of all the agencies and apply to all of them. Even as a student, you can get plenty of work and use your language skills. It is also a really rewarding job when you realise you're helping people communicate!



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Good luck with your job search!

Vlad Mackevic



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## About the Author

Vlad Mackevic is a freelance author entrepreneur. He writes non-fiction for the mind and fiction for the soul. His non-fiction includes how-to books for students that can be downloaded or purchased from this website and articles that can be accessed for FREE via The Lecture Room. You can view Vlad's fiction and blog for writers atEynhallowBooks where he writes under the pen name Roy Eynhallow. Vlad graduated from Aston University, Birmingham in 2011 with a First Class in International Relations and English Language.

Before graduating, he published three academic papers in the Debut Journal for Undergraduate Research in the field of linguistics (see here, here and here if you're interested). Vlad has also worked as a writing mentor for three years, teaching students essay writing skills and as a communications officer for the Science and Technology Facilities Council for a year. He also has several publications of short fiction in small literary magazines and is currently writing two novels. Vlad is currently living in Birmingham, United Kingdom.

Connect to Vlad online:

**Websites**

www.FirstYearCounts.com
www.TheLectureRoom.co.uk

**For Fiction (pen name Roy Eynhallow)**

www.EynhallowBooks.com

**Facebook**

https://www.facebook.com/First.year.counts

**Twitter**

http://twitter.com/Vlad_Mackevic
http://twitter.com/EynhalowBooks

**LinkedIn**

http://www.linkedin.com/in/vladmackevic

# How to Write a CV with Little or No Work Experience

**A guidebook for students and young graduates**

**By Vlad Mackevic**

**Published online and on Amazon**

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